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## **An emotional turn in journalism studies?**

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## Title: An emotional turn in journalism studies?

### Abstract

This article develops the idea of an “emotional turn” in journalism studies, which has led to an increasingly nuanced investigation of the role of emotion in the production, texts and audience engagement with journalism. These developments have occurred in tandem with, and accelerated by, the emergence of digital and social media.

Research on *news production* has shown that journalistic work has always taken emotion into consideration, shaping approaches to storytelling and presentation.

However, the view of journalists as detached observers has rendered the *emotional labor* associated with news production invisible. Research on emotion in *journalistic texts* has highlighted the fact that even conventional “hard news genres” are shaped by an engagement with emotion. As studies on *news audiences and emotions* have shown, audiences are more likely to be emotionally engaged, recall information and take action when news stories are relatable.

The affordances of digital platforms and social media have had a profound impact on the space for emotion. The expanded opportunities for participation have contributed to questioning traditional distinctions between news audiences and producers and have ushered in new and more forms of emotional expression that have spilled over into practices of news production.

Key words: Affect, emotion, journalism studies, news audiences, objectivity, social media

## An emotional turn in journalism studies?

Introduction: Emotion as an “epistemological blind spot” in journalism studies

Research on emotion in journalism has been slow to arrive, despite the burgeoning growth of journalism studies over the past few decades. This article discusses the reasons for the relative neglect of emotion. It then develops the idea that we have seen a recent “emotional turn” in journalism studies, leading to an increasingly nuanced and diverse investigation of the role of emotion across contexts of production, text and audience engagement with journalism. This “emotional turn” has developed alongside and informed by the rapid technological changes of the digital era, which have ushered in a greater role for emotion in journalism. The article provides a context for engaging this virtual special issue of *Digital Journalism*, which showcases cutting-edge contributions to the swiftly emerging body of research in the area.

Emotion, objectivity and journalism studies

The relative scarcity of research on emotion in journalism can, in large part, be attributed to journalism’s allegiance to the model of liberal democracy, and the associated ideal of objectivity. In liberal democratic societies, news organizations are seen to play a vital role as a 'Fourth Estate' which acts as a watchdog on concentrations of power, including government. Media derive their legitimacy from their political independence, which is frequently put into practice through adherence

to journalistic objectivity. Objectivity has commonly been understood in terms of the exclusion of values from the journalistic narrative and has been frequently discussed as the polar opposite of emotion (Maras, 2013). As Epstein (1973) memorably put it, the norm of objectivity generates detached “news from nowhere” – a form of narrative which conceals the authorial voice of the journalist.

When journalism is emotional, it is therefore often seen as a threat to the standards and normative ideals of journalism. As Pantti (2010, p. 169) argued, “while ‘quality’ journalism informs and educates citizens by appealing to reason, other kinds of journalism focus on pleasing their audiences by appealing to the emotions.” Forms of journalism that fail to comply with these principles have often been derided in scholarly and public debate. For example, tabloid news has often been denounced as “sensationalist” because of the idea that it appeals to our *sensations* and represents a preoccupation with the bodily and the emotional as opposed to our *reason* (Örnebring & Jönsson, 2004). Such a preoccupation, scholars argue, may lead to an overly simplistic understanding of what are, in fact, complex stories that require an emphasis on factual information. The concern over “sensationalist” news mirrors scholarly and popular worries over related media genres - ranging from television talk shows to reality TV - which have brought discussion of emotions into the public sphere. These have led to widespread concerns over pandering to popular tastes, “dumbing down,” and “MacDonaldization” (Franklin, 2005) to mention just a few examples (see also Kotisova, 2019). Debates over the role of sensationalism in journalism have both changed shape and intensified in the era of digital and social media. Here, the role of emotions as a factor in sharing behavior has become a

major concern of news producers and scholars alike (e.g. Hermida, 2016; Kilgo et al., 2018; Kilgo, Lough & Riedel, 2017).

### An emotional turn in journalism studies?

Despite this historical neglect, we have seen a recent increase in scholarly attention to this area, in part spurred on by a broader “affective turn” (Clough & Halley, 2007) across humanities and social sciences disciplines. Here, I focus on discussing the “emotional turn” in journalism studies. I deliberately use the term “emotion,” as opposed to the widely circulating and often interchangeably used “affect” (Ross, 2015, p. 20). Those who recognize the salience of the distinction between affect and emotion have tended to view affect as a superordinate label, which understands emotion as just one of multiple affective processes (e.g. Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). For example, Zizi Papacharissi (2015), the media scholar most closely associated with work in the area, views affect as an umbrella term which encompasses emotion:

Emotion is subsumed within affect, and perhaps the most intense part of affect. Yet affect itself extends beyond feeling as a general way of sense-making. It informs our general sensibility toward the world surrounding us. (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 15)

One of the most important articulations of the distinction between affect and emotion can be found in the work of Brian Massumi (2002). He proposed that affect is best understood as a bodily sensation in an individual, a reaction to stimuli characterized by intensity and energy, but without a conscious orientation and interpretation. By contrast, an emotion is:

[A] subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. (Massumi, 2002, p. 28).

Though Massumi described emotional reactions as *personal* and individual first and foremost, his distinction has also become an important resource for sociologists and political scientists interested in *collective* behavior, premised as it is on emotion as both interpretation and narrativization of affect, or its placement in the nexus of social relations. This offers us a way out of a narrowly individualist understanding of emotion, foregrounding the “fundamental principle that an emotion cannot be seen purely as an internal, individual, and private phenomenon” (Boehner et al., 2007, p. 280). Instead, it enables us to understand emotion as a potentially politicized or politicizing interpretation of bodily affect which occurs when it is translated into emotion in the context of media discourse.

I therefore find it helpful to maintain the distinction between affect and emotion, and to define *emotion as the relational interpretation of affect experienced in individual bodies* (see also Davidson and Milligan, 2004) - one that may become public and collective through naming, articulation and circulation. Such a definition of emotion has several implications. First, it is closely aligned with a sociological approach which sees *emotions as fundamentally relational; evolving out of the interactions of individuals with culture and underlying social structures* (Burkitt, 2014; Clay-Warner, 2014; Holmes, 2004; Stets and Turner, 2008). This also means that emotions evolve

through ever-ongoing, dynamic and interactive processes (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012). This is not to say that emotions are purely “social, cultural and political constructs” (Flam, 2005, p. 19) and therefore do not exist outside of their discursive construction. Rather, this approach suggests that it is both relevant and interesting to consider *which* emotions do gain purchase in the public sphere, *why*, and *with what consequences*. Such a view also entails a distinction between emotions as circulating in individual bodies and emotions as discursively constructed through media texts - or what we might refer to as “mediated emotion” as a distinctive discursive practice (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018b). This includes an understanding of mediated emotional expression as carefully staged, for particular purposes, and as a fundamental driver of social and political action (Wettergren, 2005). Such an understanding of emotion allows us to not just acknowledge the presence of emotion in journalism – across contexts of production, texts and audience engagement – but also to appreciate its complexity as an integral part of the political claims made by actors in the public sphere, frequently channeled through journalistic practices. At the same time, this definition should not preclude attention to work that uses vocabularies associated with affect, given the fact that they are closely related and sometimes interchangeable.

In proclaiming “an emotional turn” in journalism studies, the intention is not to suggest a paradigm shift or a major change in the prevailing research agenda in the field. Rather, against the backdrop of an increasingly fragmented and diverse field, it is to point out that the relationship between journalism and emotion represents a rapidly developing area of inquiry which opens up for new research agendas, with



particular relevance for the study of digital journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2020). If emotion has historically constituted an “epistemological blind spot” or an “elephant in the room” of journalism studies (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019; see also Kotisova, 2019), the emotional turn means that a growing number of scholars in the field are now attentive to the place of emotion in shaping the production, texts and audience engagement with journalism. Such work is facilitated through energetic interdisciplinary poaching – drawing on the insights of adjacent disciplines, including but not limited to sociology, psychology, political science, philosophy and anthropology. Interdisciplinary poaching is not unique to the study of emotion in journalism. Rather, it is characteristic of the broader scholarly practices of journalism studies. In the absence of its own “native theories,” this emergent discipline has tended to draw on a wide variety of approaches from across the humanities and social sciences (e.g. Ahva & Steensen, 2020).

Because of the diversity of influences shaping the study of emotion in journalism studies, this also means that although the notion of a “turn” implies a unified and coherent change of direction, I here use the phrase slightly differently: It is intended to suggest that scholars are now seriously engaging with the role of emotion across the contexts of journalistic production, content and consumption, using the wide variety of theoretical and methodological tools at our disposal. This richness is evident in articles included in this virtual special issue of *Digital Journalism*. They represent a diverse array of preoccupations and methods, ranging from studies of immersive journalism (Hassan, 2019; Sánchez Laws, 2017) to the impact of uncivil online comments on audience evaluations (Waddell, 2018), sharing behaviors

associated with emotional appeals (Kilgo, Lough and Riedl, 2017), and the creation of a climate of fear in diasporic news blogs.

First, two articles shed light on the relationship between the emotionality of news texts and audience behavior and engagement. Zou's (2018) studied a Chinese diasporic blog, *Chinese in SF Bay Area*, as an emotional counterpublic. Zou suggests that digital technology "facilitates emotional news production" (p. 2) and takes a particular interest in the role of fear as contributing to civic engagement. This is an important insight, as fear is often denounced as an immobilizing emotion, and it therefore invites us to look more closely into the varied kinds of work done by particular emotions across contexts. Kilgo, Lough and Riedl (2017) studied the role of emotions in coverage of the Ice Bucket Challenge, and subsequent social media sharing behaviors. Their study highlighted the importance of hope and sadness as prevalent emotions in journalistic coverage and demonstrated that audiences are more likely to share stories that draw on hope, anger, fear and humor on Facebook. At the same time, the authors call attention to significant differences in audience behaviors across platforms: While emotional appeals appeared to influence sharing on Facebook, the same pattern was not replicated on Twitter. This suggests the need for further careful research on the emotional affordances of social media platforms. Waddell's (2018) paper looked at broader questions around the impact of negative comments accompanying news teasers on social media. His research demonstrates that the presence of negative comments decreased news credibility and issue importance, and that these effects are amplified when negatives comments are perceived as highly memorable or authentic. His study serves as a

useful reminder of the fact that news stories cannot be viewed in isolation, but that instead, they are increasingly accessed in the context of social media, against the framework created by fellow audience members.

Finally, Hassan (2019) and Sánchez Laws (2017) explore new frontiers in the relationship between emotion and journalism through their investigations of recent experiments in immersive journalism. Despite claims that virtual reality technologies may facilitate the creation of empathy, Hassan (2019) argues that “digital media cannot replicate analogue communication processes without generating gaps” (p. 1). For Hassan (2019, p.1), the technology ultimately risks further distancing the audience member from events in the “actual world,” instead producing a “commodity spectacle.” Sánchez Laws (2017) takes a more optimistic view of the potential of immersive journalism. Through her analysis of prominent examples of immersive journalism projects, she suggests that “some strands of immersive journalism are beginning to meet the requirements which enable us to witness the emotions of others and to thereby feel empathy for them” (p. 11). However, she points to numerous unresolved ethical and practical issues that must be addressed to resolve the distinctive journalistic responsibilities associated with the new form.

The remainder of this article sets the stage for this virtual special issue by charting how scholarship on journalism and emotion has shown that emotion plays a crucial role in the *production, texts and audience engagement* with journalism. At the same time, the digital era has ushered in a greater role for “ordinary people” in processes

of news production and has, in doing so, has contributed to opening up new spaces for more emotional and embodied accounts, and has also shaped journalistic approaches to storytelling across social media and traditional platforms and genres. These preoccupations and advances are evident in the articles included in this virtual special issue. But the growth and increasing sophistication of such work also reflect the consolidation of a body of knowledge which has rendered visible the elephant in the room, and thereby the need to revisit received understandings and approaches.

### Emotion and news production

Scholarship on the role of emotion and emotional labor in the production of journalism has demonstrated that journalistic work has always taken emotion into consideration. As Chris Peters (2011) argued, the binary opposition between objectivity and emotion has obscured the fact that journalism has *always* been emotional, given the central goal of “crafting an experience of involvement.” If anything, the importance of emotion to journalistic storytelling – and journalists’ uneasy recognition of its vital role – has been a consistent theme in research on professional practices (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen & Schmidt, 2020). Mervi Pantti (2010) was one of the first scholars to examine these questions, through her research on Finnish broadcast journalists’ views on the appropriate use of emotion in reporting. While she identified highly critical views of “emotional news” amongst the journalists she interviewed, she also showed that journalists widely recognized the importance of emotional expression given its key role in facilitating audience understanding. Finnish broadcast journalists understood the presentation of individual and collective emotions as part of a journalistic responsibility to reveal the “whole truth” of a story.

Journalists' awareness of the value of such storytelling shapes their approaches to storytelling and presentation. For example, Gürsel's (2010) ethnographic work on photojournalism at an American news magazine demonstrates that to journalists, the anticipation of audience emotional reactions to stories informs deliberations over everything from photo selection to layout. She argued that the purpose of eliciting emotions in this way is to 'bring the story closer' and educate the reader. Gürsel's research points to the careful work that journalists routinely engage in to predict and manage the emotions of the audience. Similarly, for Glück (2016), who interviewed journalists in the UK and India, empathy with both audiences and sources emerged as a vital journalistic skill – one that "informed the production of journalistic texts but also covered over significant emotional labor." Through the use of these forms of "tacit knowledge," journalists generate a consensual basis for emotional resonance amongst audience members. These examples could be seen as an emerging awareness of hitherto unrecognized "emotional labor" - or the work associated with the management of feelings (Hochschild, 1983) - on the part of journalists. As the next section demonstrates, this awareness has been informed and accelerated by the changes wrought by the digital era, which have placed questions of emotion center stage in the sociology of the newsroom.

### *Emotional labor in journalism*

Journalism's commitment to objectivity has meant that journalists have historically been seen as detached and distant observers. This has rendered questions about the emotional impact of journalistic work difficult to recognize (Barnes, 2016, Hopper & Huxford 2015, 2017, Jukes 2017, Richards & Rees 2011). As a result, journalism,

as an institution, has generally given scant recognition to the emotional labor of its professionals, though it would appear to be central to their work. As Hopper and Huxford (2017, p. 90) note in their study of how journalism textbooks address issues around emotional labor in journalism, while “there are directives for journalists to manipulate their own emotions in order to be successful in their trade, there is little if any clear instruction on how this may be done.” In Richards and Rees’ (2011, p. 851) work on journalists’ emotional labor in traumatic situations, they found “a broad and fundamental ambivalence in the professional discourse of journalism between objectivity and emotional engagement, and a striking inattention to questions about the emotional impact of journalists’ work upon audiences.” Similarly, after interviewing 25 journalists involved in covering traumatic events, Jukes (2017, p. 4) concluded that “what emerges is a complex picture of journalists grappling with competing tensions – on the one hand a virtually hard-wired notion of what it is to be a professional journalist and, on the other hand, a visceral, empathic often instinctive affective dimension of practice.”

Despite the historical inattention to the emotional impact of journalistic work, these issues continue to emerge in work on journalistic practices surrounding traumatic and crisis events, ranging from “death knock” interviews, (Duncan, 2012, Duncan & Newton, 2012) and traffic accidents (Barnes, 2016), to reporting on wars, terrorism and disasters (e.g. Jukes, 2017; Pantti, Cottle & Wahl-Jorgensen 2012). For example, Kotisova’s (2017b) work on Belgian journalists’ experiences of covering a local terror attack highlighted how proximate disasters have a significant emotional impact on journalists, blurring boundaries between personal and professional lives and challenging conceptions of journalistic objectivity. In a separate study of Czech

journalists' coverage of the 2015 refugee crisis and the Paris terrorist attacks, Kotisova (2017a) demonstrated the emergence of an "emotional culture" of cynicism which enabled journalists to maintain their sanity and distance against the backdrop of reporting on such traumatic events. Jukes' (2017) research on journalists' reflections on the coverage of crises showed that professionals developed a "cool-detached" approach to shield themselves from the emotional impact of these events, through a set of practices consistent with the commitment to objectivity.

As Jukes (2017) and others have pointed out, journalists' emotional labor has intensified in the digital era. For example, newswriters are now frequently tasked with curating large quantities of often highly graphic imagery drawn from user-generated content (Jukes, 2017). At the same time, the affordances of the digital era have brought about a greatly expanded "interactive spectrum" (Canter, 2013) which requires journalists to engage with audiences across platforms (see more detailed discussion below).

It is, however, also important to understand journalism as a profession which is profoundly shaped by *positive* emotional attachments. More than many other secular professions, journalism view their work as a "calling" (Weaver et al., 2009, p. 58). They are motivated to enter the profession by abstract ideals, frequently bordering on the spiritual: They view journalism as a public service and a "noble profession" (Weaver et al., 2009, p. 58). Journalists are emotionally committed to the news organizations they work for, the actual work they do, and the idea of bringing news to the public. For this reason, studies of journalists' "goodbye narratives" – or accounts they have shared upon leaving news organisations – have emphasized their

nostalgia for and attachment to journalism in the face of the decline of the industry (e.g. Usher, 2010; Spaulding, 2016).

However, the emotional attachment of journalists is a precarious one, and varies according to social, economic and material circumstances (O'Donnell, Zion & Sherwood, 2016; Russo, 1998). Morini, Carls and Armano (2014, para 26) observed that pleasure of work in journalism is undermined by precarisation and loss of autonomy, which leads to “emotional distancing and disengagement from work.”

Other writers on the topic explicitly relate the crisis in journalism to mental health challenges for professionals. Scott Reinardy (2016), in his magisterial study of journalists' experience of the collapse of the newspaper industry, gave the example of a former journalist obsessively tracking job losses and newspaper closures and developing “newspaper depression” as a result (Reinardy, 2016, p. 8). Similarly, Meyers and Davidson (2014, p. 1002) suggested that the crisis in the journalism industry has induced an “occupational sense of passive resignation,” all the more devastating in a profession defined by its energetic engagement with society's power structures. Similarly, a large study of journalists leaving the profession showed that many of those who lost their jobs were “emotionally traumatized” and experienced “anger and anxiety” (O'Donnell, Zion & Sherwood, 2016).

These observations point to the importance of understanding the day-to-day emotional pressures of work - and the ways in which it accumulates and changes shape over the course of a career. Such pressures include not just the constant specter of redundancy, casualization, cutbacks and general job insecurity (Ekdale et



al., 2015), but also the challenges of dealing with constant technological change (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009), worries about libel suits, and coping with the competitive environment of the profession, to mention just a few shared experiences.

The studies cited here represent an emerging area of inquiry that interrogates how structural change in the journalistic profession - including technological transformations, challenges to the business model of news, and the growing precarity of journalistic labor - is impacting on journalists' emotions and their investment in their work. While these studies have contributed to a reappraisal of how journalistic practices are informed by emotional responses – journalists' own, as well as those of the imagined audience - there is also growing attention to the ways in which technological changes are transforming journalistic practices, carving out an increased space for emotional storytelling (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018a).

### *Technological change, audience participation and emotion*

First, the rise of what is variably referred to as citizen journalism, produsage and user-generated content has been seen to contribute to ushering in a more emotional form of news, spilling over into the content of mainstream media and shaping the conduct of professional journalists in the context of a radically altered media ecology. Citizen journalists are often amateurs who happen to be on the scene of breaking news events – or what some scholars have referred to as “accidental journalists” (Allan, 2013). Such accidental journalists have not been trained in objective reporting and their footage is shot and their stories told from a first-person, highly embodied point of view which challenges the objective reporting of professional journalists and is often far more emotional (Blaagaard, 2013). For example, the first footage of

events ranging from the Asian tsunami in 2004 to the Boston marathon bombings in 2013 came from ordinary people who filmed the events on portable cameras and mobile phones (Allan, 2009). The participation of “ordinary people” through practices of citizen witnessing is shaped not by the routines and values of mainstream news, but rather by the vernacular of lived experience (e.g. Chouliaraki, 2010, p. 307). This reshapes the epistemology – or ways of knowing – of journalism by privileging the perceived authenticity of personal accounts, and the often emotional registers through which they are narrated (e.g. Chouliaraki, 2010; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016).

The emergence of social media has further accelerated such transformation, spilling over into the practice of professional journalists. Beckett and Deuze (2016, p. 6) have detected a trend “toward a more mobile, personalized, and emotionally driven news media” in the era of networked news.” Journalists, in particular, are more likely to share their personal opinions as well as details of their personal life on Twitter (Lasorsa, Lewis & Holton, 2012). Drawing on their observations of breaking news events, they are more likely place themselves in the stories (Ojala, Pantti & Kangas, 2016; Pantti, 2019). Such sharing is central to the creation of their own personal brand and the cultivation of likeability (Steensen, 2016). More broadly, it sits within a sociological shift in news production practices that has opened up new spaces for emotional expression by journalists (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016).

Scholars who have studied social movements’ use of Twitter have made closely related arguments about how the platform’s affordances facilitate the public expression of emotion in ways that may shape journalistic coverage. For example,

Zizi Papacharissi (2015) has developed the notion of “affective publics,” taking a particular interest in social movements’ use of Twitter hashtags. Through the use of hashtags, she argued, social movements collaboratively construct their own “affective news streams,” formed out of a combination of accounts of subjective experience, opinion, and emotion. These affective news streams may serve a vital role in defining the experience and identity of particular movements but also spill over into mainstream media as they grow in and through networked publics. To mention just one example, such hashtag activism has brought the issue of domestic violence into public debate, through shared experiences of abuse - but ones refracted through the lens of a multitude of individual experiences. This paved the way for the #metoo hashtag, which in 2017 and 2018 has called attention to sexual harassment and assault experienced by women and men around the world, creating a “shared, global, voice to begin talking about the sexism that still underpins our society” (Van Hensbergen, 2017). The campaign succeeded in making a radical intervention in public debate, and the “silence breakers” – those taking great risks to speak out in public about sexual assault – became *Time* Person of the Year for 2017 (Zacharek, Dockterman & Edwards, 2017). The phenomenon of hashtag activism could be seen as an example of the ways in which the reconfigured media ecology of the digital era has brought about a “logic of connective action” which depends upon personalized content sharing across media networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Such sharing is often informed by and gives voice to emotional concerns shaped by lived experience, breaking down conventional binary distinctions between public and private spheres (e.g. Papacharissi, 2010). Together, these perspectives suggest that the new media ecology has not only transformed emotional expression, but also, in doing so, reshaped our understanding and practices of public life.

## Emotion in journalistic texts

Although technological change associated with the digital era, and the journalistic practices resulting from it, are widely seen to have legitimized more emotional journalism, it is also important to consider such development in the light of longer historical trajectories. While the rise of a more subjective, emotional and confessional form of journalism may have accelerated in response to the digital era and the emergence of social media, it has a long history that can be traced back traditions of narrative journalism which have privileged emotional forms of storytelling as essential to the genre (Coward, 2013).

Even if the use of emotionality and intimacy in the practices of the early commercial press has been well established in scholarship on journalism history, dominant accounts have often assumed that “serious” and “quality” journalism in the 20th century has been informed by the ideal of objectivity (e.g. Schudson, 1978). However, recent research has contributed to complicating these accounts. For example, it has established that emotion is, in fact, central to the most highly valued forms of journalistic storytelling - the winners of the Pulitzer Prize (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Here, it is presented in carefully managed ways, operating through a “strategic ritual of emotionality.” This strategic ritual of emotionality works alongside and in tandem with the strategic ritual of objectivity and involves the frequent use of anecdotal leads and personalized storytelling - or the inclusion of human interest stories. By narrating the emotions of sources, award-winning journalism effectively “outsources” the expression of emotion, thereby complying with the demands of

objective journalism. At the same time, by telling the stories of individuals caught up in major news events of social and political importance, such events come to be grounded in the lived and relatable experience of ordinary people. In a study comparing the use of the strategic ritual of emotionality in Australian and Chinese hard news reporting of risk-related events, including food safety, bush fires and earthquakes, Huan (2017) showed that while journalists in both countries draw on emotional storytelling as a way of establishing social order, there are significant differences in practices. While Australian stories focus on the emotions of ordinary people, Chinese journalism tends to align with power elites. Through engaging in these practices, journalists in both countries sought to contribute to building distinctive forms of solidarity. While the strategic ritual of emotionality may be at work across cultures, it articulates in ways informed by broader national political contexts.

Advancing an understanding of emotion as both a strategic resource and a professional challenge for journalists, Rosas' interview-based study of Spanish online journalists (2018) demonstrated a complex field of tensions in this sense. On the one hand, he showed that some journalists use emotion strategically, frequently justified as a way of enhancing audience engagement (as measured by web metrics). On the other hand, a significant number of his interviewees engaged in "strategic avoidance" of emotion on the basis of an allegiance to the ideal of objectivity.

This body of research remains in its earliest stages and merits further elaboration across national contexts and journalistic cultures. More broadly, the practice of outsourcing emotion in journalistic texts is documented in work using discourse

analysis of journalistic texts. For example, Stenvall (2014) has illustrated that news agency copy - conventionally associated with a particularly strong commitment to objectivity - draws widely on emotional language in the form of expressions of affect. However, news agency journalists do not tend to discuss their own emotions, but rather base their reports on observations of the emotions of others. This, however, is true not just for “hard news” genres such as news agency stories, but also for popular journalistic forms, such as tabloid journalism. As Johanssen and Garrisi (2019) demonstrated, in their study of tabloid coverage of acid attacks on women, “journalists try to turn painful embodied states into rational discourse” by focusing on the experience of individuals. In the stories they examined, this is done through a “focus on intense pain.” Such a focus, the authors argue, may enable a particular affective relationality to emerge that is felt by victims, journalists and audiences alike” (Johanssen & Garrisi, 2019, p. 463).

Along similar lines, a distinct emerging body of scholarship has examined the role of “intimacy” in journalism, understood as the inclusion of personal opinions and self-disclosures in journalistic texts. Scholars examining “intimization” (Steensen, 2016) or the growth in “subjective and confessional journalism” (Coward, 2013) have observed that this shift has taken place largely, but not exclusively, outside “hard news” genres, often in the context of human interest or confessional forms of journalism. As Coward noted, personal “pieces and first-person real-life stories have become ever more abundant, either written by the protagonists themselves or ‘as told to’ journalists. Features have become more intimate and confessional while even news stories now include many personal stories” (2013, p. 6). This has been helped by the rise of more intimate forms of audio storytelling, including podcasts,

which have expanded the space for autobiographical accounts by journalists (e.g. Lindgren, 2017). Reflecting broader discussions around the role of intimacy in public discourse (e.g. Stanyer, 2013), the use of such intimate storytelling has often worked to establish the authenticity of the storyteller, establishing journalists or their subjects as inherently trustworthy (Enli, 2015).

This work has highlighted the role of journalists as subjective actors capable of narrating their own emotions and experiences. It shows that journalists must be understood as embodied chroniclers of events, in ways that frequently challenge established understandings of professional distance. A particularly poignant context which illustrates this role can be found in work on coverage of disasters and crises.

Disasters and crises are moments of heightened drama, where journalistic coverage might contribute to creating and shaping local and global publics (e.g. Yell, 2012). As Huan (2017) argues in this virtual special issue, emotions contribute to reaffirming shared values in the face of events that might otherwise disturb the social order. This approach to the use of emotion in journalistic storytelling sees journalists as playing an integrative role in strengthening communities, stepping outside the normative role of objective and distanced observers. Such an approach is perhaps most consistently illustrated in the work of Mervi Pantti and her collaborators, who have carried out a number of studies of emotion and mediated rituals. In their analysis of media coverage of the assassination of the Dutch populist right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn, Pantti and Wieten (2006, p. 6) demonstrated that a “nationwide bereaved community was created by focusing on expressions of mourning, and converting emotions like anger and hate into a unifying and less destructive depiction of grief”

(see also Pantti, 2005; Pantti & Van Zoonen, 2006). Similarly, in a study of a Finnish bus crash which killed a large group of young people, Pantti and Sumiala (2009) found that the public mourning ritual generated through media coverage focused on cultivating social inclusiveness. Relatedly, research has found that in the coverage of death, media coverage focuses on the emotions of survivors, providing “psychological instruction” that helps audiences develop norms of proper “grieving behaviour” (Walter, Littlewood and Pickering, 1995). Such coverage, then, tells us about how we collectively and socially narrate emotions for larger purposes. Taken together, such approaches account for the role of journalism in restoring order and stability through the use of emotional storytelling. This reflects a shift in journalistic roles and obligations at times of crisis, suggesting that media organizations contribute to smoothing social relations and enhancing cohesiveness. This is an important insight which refines our understandings of journalism’s role in society by recognizing that journalistic practices are not monolithic, but rather shift in relation to the normative and practical demands of particular stories and events, and the ways these interact with broader socio-political contexts.

Such questions are essential to the influential work of Lilie Chouliaraki, which has examined the ways in which journalistic coverage of “distant suffering” positions the spectator. Chouliaraki (2006) distinguished between three forms of news associated with the coverage of suffering. She identifies “ecstatic news” as a form which gives agency to sufferers - granting them the power to feel, reflect and act on their fate. In her analysis, this opens up for audiences to care for and act on lives outside their own communities. This facilitates cosmopolitanism - or the ability to understand ourselves as members of a global community with allegiances that go beyond the nation state.



## News audiences and emotion

Other scholars have built on this framework, insisting on the importance of audience research on mediated suffering in a global context. This is particularly important given the emphasis in journalism studies and related fields on researching practices of production and journalistic texts, while paying less attention to what audiences actually do with journalism. As Kyriakidou (2009) has demonstrated in a series of studies based on focus group research with audiences in Greece, discourses of cosmopolitanism, while salient, are usually framed within the context of the nation state audience engagement as witnesses of suffering takes a variety of forms. In a later study, Kyriakidou (2015) developed a typology of forms of witnessing. She distinguishes between affective witnessing, characterised by an intense emotional involvement with suffering; ecstatic witnessing shaped by the immediacy of the experience; politicized witnessing, informed by relations of political and social power, and detached witnessing, which describes “the experience of the suffering of others as something remote or ultimately irrelevant to the viewers’ everyday life” (Kyriakidou, 2015, p. 226). Jonathan Corpus Ong (e.g. 2015) has carried out extensive research on audiences in the Philippines. As he argued, much of the literature on cosmopolitanism assumes a Western elite subject as the audience member and makes assumptions about the responses of this (frequently unquestioned) category to the representation of distant suffering, as in the case of disasters, crises and conflicts. His work demonstrates that responses to suffering cannot be treated in such a generalized fashion. Instead, he argues, in the case of audiences in the “disaster-prone” Philippines, we must consider responses to both

distant and proximal suffering. These studies highlight the fact that we cannot understand the role of emotion in journalism without studying how audiences engage with journalistic texts.

Indeed, the past decade has seen what we might describe as an “audience turn” in journalism studies (e.g. Loosen & Schmidt, 2012), which has come about in active dialogue with work representing a turn to questions of emotion. Here, research has shown that consumers of news media frequently question the detached and disembodied stance of conventional journalism and seek out more emotionally engaging content (Meijer, 2013). This work resonates with longer-standing and well-established research agendas in mass communication research on audience effects. Such research tends to use experimental or quasi-experimental methods, informed by the individual-level perspectives of psychological approaches which contrast with the sociological orientation of much work in journalism studies.

This tradition has nonetheless contributed key insights of relevance to journalism studies scholars. Among other things, it has called attention to the importance of audience emotional engagement, showing that audience enjoyment is, in part, premised on narrative structure in ways that may challenge conventional journalistic genres (Levy, 1979; Levy & Windahl, 1984). For example, Sylvia Knobloch and her colleagues (2004) found that higher “reading enjoyment for discourse structures typical for entertainment content implies that the classic inverted-pyramid news format does not maximize pleasure for print news users.” On that basis, they called for “the importance of understanding affective appeals of reporting” (Knobloch et al. 2004: 282). Building on such insights, recent experimental studies by Bas and Grabe

have highlighted the importance of “emotion-provoking personalization” of news, showing that including the emotional testimonies of ordinary people in investigative stories limited knowledge gaps between higher and lower education groups (e.g. Bas and Grabe, 2015) and encourages political participation (Bas & Grabe, 2016; see also Grabe et al., 2017; Oschatz, Emde-Lachmund & Klimmt, 2019). Similarly, experimental studies of stories about mass violence in Africa have demonstrated that “story personification” – or stories focused on the plight of a single victim – contribute to elevating emotional responses and thereby “bolster support for intervention” (Maier, Slovic & Mayorga, 2016, p. 1012). Story personalization has also been demonstrated to affect audience recall of news (Mujica & Bachmann, 2018). Indeed, questions of the relationship between emotions and memory have preoccupied experimental researchers for some decades now, resulting in robust findings on how particular images may invoke distinct emotions, such as anger, fear and disgust, and highlighting the fact that images inducing anger are more memorable (Newhagen, 1998; see also Bucy, 2003; Bucy & Newhagen, 1999).

In recent years, work informed by the effects tradition has also taken important steps towards incorporating the role of emotions into well-established areas of research where they have been previously overlooked, reflecting a broader emotional turn. For example, Lecheler and her colleagues have sought to better develop our understanding of how emotions shape framing effects (e.g. Lecheler, Bos and Vliegenhart, 2015; Lecheler, 2018). Their work has suggested that it is particularly important to take emotions into consideration because they might “outperform variables traditionally used to explain the psychology of framing effects” (Lecheler,

2018, p. 71). Such an approach requires attention to the relevance of discrete emotions, with their research demonstrating that while “anger and enthusiasm mediate a framing effect, contentment and fear do not”(Lecheler, Schuck and de Vreese, 2013, p. 189).

Together, this body of research calls attention to the fact that audience engagement with journalism is best understood through a lens which acknowledges a complex balancing act where meaning comes about in the interplay between abstract factual information and concrete, emotional and personalized storytelling.

The digital media ecology has opened up for new ways of studying news audiences using “big data,” and has coincided with a growing recognition of the importance of emotion for the audience experience. For example, the emergence of social media has seen the growth of data-driven sentiment analysis and emotion detection. These methods are used to understand large-scale patterns in emotionally underpinned evaluations of everything from political leaders to beauty products, as well as to develop personalized news delivery (e.g. Montoyo, Martínez-Barco, & Balahur, 2012). The growth in such methods relies on the implicit assumption that emotions are inseparable from opinion, evaluation and decision-making, undermining long-standing binary distinctions between rationality and emotionality.

More fundamentally, the digital media ecology has profoundly challenged the category of the news audience itself – as captured in Rosen’s (2006) famous discussion of “The People Formerly Known as the Audience.” It has broken down

previously rigid distinctions between news producers and consumers, as highlighted in the salience of the concept of “produsage” (Bruns, 2008) – or user-led content creation. As such, although this article has drawn on the established analytical categories of production, texts and audiences, its emphasis on the role of emotion in journalism has also shown that these categories have been thrown fundamentally into question, in part as a result of the emergence of digital and social media.

## Conclusion

This article has traced the “emotional turn” in journalism studies that has operated in tandem with the transformations associated with the rise of digital and social media. It has suggested that despite a historical neglect of the role of emotion, the past decade has seen the emergence of a diverse body of scholarship across contexts of news production, texts and audiences. Research on *news production* has shown that journalistic work has always taken emotion into consideration, shaping approaches to storytelling and presentation. However, the view of journalists as detached and distant observers has rendered invisible the *emotional labor* associated with news production. This neglect of journalists’ emotional labor is, however, beginning to be redressed through the work of researchers who have documented the impact of covering crises and traumatic events. At the same time, the role of emotion in journalistic storytelling has been reshaped by technological changes. The digital era and the emergence of social media have ushered in a greater role for “ordinary people” in news production, facilitating a more emotional approach. Research on emotion in *journalistic texts* has highlighted the fact that even conventional “hard news genres” – ranging from agency copy to Pulitzer Prize winning investigative

stories – are shaped by an engagement with emotion. Emotion is built into news through routinized practices associated with a “strategic ritual of emotionality.” As studies of *news audiences and emotions* has shown, the established journalistic practices of building in emotion through personalized storytelling have a significant impact on audience engagement: Audiences are more likely to be emotionally engaged, recall information and take action when news stories are relatable.

The era of digital journalism has contributed to a rapid transformation in the role of emotion across these contexts. At the most fundamental level, the new media ecology has brought the fundamental category of news audiences/consumers into question through the drastic expansion in opportunities for ordinary people to shape the news. The emergence of citizen journalism and user-generated content has generated new ways of knowing, through personalized and embodied accounts of news events. Secondly, the advent of social media has further amplified these trends by both opening up for the creation of affective news streams facilitated by the logic of connective actions. These developments, in turn, have spilled over into the practice of professional journalists who are now authorized to communicate in more emotional and personal ways through an array of platforms.

Together, these insights pave the way for a new set of research questions in the study of digital journalism. Ultimately, they invite us to revisit fundamental normative theories underpinning journalism studies. A more nuanced engagement with the role of emotion in digital journalism has several implications. First, it invites us to attend to the new demands for emotional labor placed on journalists in the digital era, alongside the new opportunities for telling stories in more personal and emotional

ways. Second, it invites us to build an appreciation of such emotional journalistic storytelling into our appraisal of platforms and affordances. Third, it alerts us to the need for a more nuanced appraisal of how new – and still emerging – forms of participation and creation reshape the epistemology and boundaries of journalism. Finally, it implies that once we know to look to look for emotions across contexts of news production, texts and audience engagement, we will find them everywhere. As such, the task of understanding what emotions *do* across context of digital journalism is only just beginning.

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